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ABSTRACT

This report describes the history of racial integration in the Tulsa (Oklahoma) Public Schools from 1954 to 1982. The first section examines integration from 1954 to 1969, and discusses such initial steps as boundary changes and school transfers that were made in response to government policy and legislation for integration. The second section discusses the integration of all teaching staffs from 1968 to 1981. The third section examines integration activities from 1970 to 1982, undertaken in accordance with a desegregation plan negotiated between the U.S. Department of Justice and the Tulsa Public Schools. Separate descriptions of integration/desegregation in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools discuss busing and area rezoning, orientation activities, curriculum enrichment to attract students, and intensive recruitment efforts, as well as community responses to the integration efforts. The fourth section describes efforts to smooth the integration process with the use of a consultative center/human relations department in the district, better lines of communication between schools and homes, and adjustment counselors in the schools. A final section reports on the district's progress in reducing racial isolation of black students, indicating a gain in black enrollment in the public schools and a loss in white enrollment between 1968 and 1981. (MJL)

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A History of Integration in the Tulsa Public Schools

1954-1982

". . . Consequently the appellee School District bears the affirmative duty of redescribing the Tulsa attendance zones so as to reduce and where reasonably possible to eliminate the racial identity of that group of students designated to attend any particular school."

--United States Court of Appeals
Tenth Circuit
July Term, 1970

Instructional Support Services
Dr. Paul McCloud, Associate Superintendent
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Tulsa Public Schools
Tulsa, Oklahoma
July, 1982

UD 022 601

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A History of Integration in the Tulsa Public Schools
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Integration from 1954 to 1969

Until 1954, all Tulsa schools were totally segregated by race as required by state law. Black students attended "separate" schools staffed by black teachers and administered by Tulsa County officials utilizing funds from a separate county levy. In 1954 there were six separate schools--Bunche, Dunbar, Johnson and South Haven Elementaries, Carver Junior High and Washington Senior High. These schools enrolled 4,573 students, or 9.3% of the total membership of 49,212 in the Tulsa Public Schools.

In 1954 the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the "separate but equal" doctrine under which Oklahoma schools had always operated. In the fall of 1955, in compliance with this ruling, school attendance areas in Tulsa were redrawn according to the neighborhood concept. These new boundaries placed some black children in schools which were previously all white and some white children in schools which were previously all black. Any student was permitted, however, to transfer from a school in which his race was a minority to a school where his race was a majority, upon request of his parents. If such a request was not received, the child was expected to attend the school within his home area. This policy was approved by the Board of Education to take effect in September, 1955 and had the support of both the black and white press in Tulsa.

During the next ten years, as the black population grew and moved into other areas of the city, black youngsters became a part of the elementary and secondary schools serving the areas where they lived. Burroughs, Emerson and Roosevelt were among the first to be affected, all ultimately becoming predominantly black.

With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, integration took on a new urgency. The attendance areas of Washington High School and Carver Junior High were altered and the affected areas added to Central High School and Roosevelt Junior High in 1965. In February, 1967, South Haven Elementary School was closed and its attendance area added to the new Remington School to achieve a more favorable level of integration. In September, 1967, portions of the Johnson Elementary and Carver Junior High attendance areas were added to the Lowell Elementary and Junior High areas to help balance enrollments and to further integration.

Osage Elementary School was phased out at the close of the 1967-68 school year. Its attendance area was split among Irving, Lombard and Johnson, and an option area with Emerson was abolished. The neighborhood school policy was maintained, but more black pupils were placed in two predominantly white schools and white children were assigned to a previously all black school.

The transfer policy was amended in 1968 to include a majority-to-minority provision which allowed any student to transfer from a school where his race was in a majority to a school where his race was in a minority. This provision remains in effect today.

In September, 1969, boundaries of fifteen schools were altered to increase integration. One change was the pairing of Lindsey Elementary School, which was predominantly white, with Douglass Elementary School, which was mostly black. Under the pairing system all first, second and third grade pupils from both attendance areas went to Douglass while all fourth, fifth and sixth graders went to Lindsey, both schools continuing to offer kindergarten to those children in their own area. Also involved in these boundary changes were Bryant and Bunche Elementary Schools; Anderson, Carver, Cleveland, Gilcrease, Horace Mann, Monroe and Roosevelt Junior High Schools; Central, McLain, Rogers and Washington Senior High Schools.

Staff Integration from 1968 to 1981

Another measure to achieve an integrated school system in Tulsa was the integration of all teaching staffs in 1968. During that summer, 184 teachers were involuntarily transferred to other buildings to meet the requirements of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as interpreted by the federal courts. This change created considerable consternation, particularly among those affected. A few teachers resigned rather than accept these new assignments. Patrons in some schools charged that their best teachers had been taken and they had been given less competent teachers in their place.

In 1969 a special committee appointed by the Superintendent made an intensive study of the problems related to faculty integration. Implementation of their recommendations relieved many of the tensions of the previous year. In 1970, however, the Tenth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals found the school system's plan unacceptable and on August 14, involuntary transfer letters were sent to additional teachers to bring the white/black faculty ratio in each school to approximately 88/12. Most teachers ultimately adjusted to these new situations and faculty integration is no longer a serious problem.

Integration from 1970 to 1982

As described earlier in this report, pupil integration efforts prior to 1970 were limited to boundary changes and transfer policies. Despite good intentions and public support for these measures, they were largely ineffective in bringing about substantial integration. Majority-to-minority transfers were few, and the district began to experience some "white flight" from the attendance areas of integrated schools. It was therefore apparent that stronger measures were needed.

In July, 1970, the Tenth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals found the school system's efforts unacceptable. The Appeals Court opinion said that Tulsa's neighborhood school policy "has constituted a system of state-imposed and state-preserved segregation, a continuing legacy of subtle yet effective discrimination." The decision was critical of faculty desegregation, student transfer policy, the district's pattern of new school construction, and school attendance boundary lines. "It is the affirmative duty of the appellee school district," the opinion stated, "to come forward with a realistic presently effective plan

for desegregation . . . and it is the continuing duty of the district court to retain jurisdiction over the case until it is clear that constitutional requirements have been achieved."

In implementing this order, the administration developed a tentative proposal for desegregation and presented it to the community in evening meetings of the Board of Education. After several months of public discussion and hearing numerous arguments for and against the proposal, an amended plan of desegregation incorporating some of the suggestions made by Tulsa citizens was formulated for presentation to the District Court, and was adopted officially by the Tulsa Board of Education on March 1, 1971. This plan, however, proved unacceptable to the U. S. Department of Justice which in June, 1971, proposed a counter plan. That plan was unacceptable to the Board of Education.

Finally in July, 1971, U. S. District Judge Fred Daugherty signed an order approving a junior and senior high school desegregation plan which had been negotiated between the U. S. Department of Justice and the Tulsa Public Schools. It was agreed that the first phase of this plan would be implemented with the opening of school in the fall of 1971. This plan allowed construction, which had been blocked by court order, to begin on Mason Senior High and Thoreau Junior High, as well as on an addition to Foster Junior High. A key element of the plan was the creation of a Metro Learning Center as a desegregated magnet program at Washington. It was projected that upon completion of Mason in 1973, students living within the Washington boundaries would be non-contiguously zoned to the other predominantly white high schools and the Metro Learning Center would continue to serve some 800 to 1,000 volunteer students at Washington.

Junior High Integration

The 1971 plan was implemented first in the junior high schools. The attendance areas of Anderson, Cleveland, Edison, Gilcrease, Hamilton, Madison, Monroe, Roosevelt and Wilson were modified to bring about a better racial balance. Carver Junior High, formerly all black, was closed that fall and its students non-contiguously zoned to Bell, Edison, Hamilton, Madison, Whitney, Wilson and Wright Junior High Schools. Anderson, which had also been all-black, was integrated by a careful redesigning of its attendance area to include 60% whites. Since Clinton and Horace Mann were already naturally integrated, only Byrd, Foster, Lewis and Clark, Nimitz and Skelly Junior Highs were unaffected by the plan.

The decision to close Carver precipitated quite a furor, not only in the black community but also among many sympathetic whites who felt the plan placed the major burden of integration on black children. When school opened in September, some in the black community called for a temporary boycott of the schools. The Carver Freedom School was established with private funds and enrolled a number of black students who refused to be bussed to the predominantly white schools to which they were assigned. Washington High School students were also asked to stay out of school in protest, and they responded in sufficient numbers to keep enrollment down appreciably for several days.

In the junior high schools, concerted efforts were made to see that integration went smoothly. Orientation sessions were held for new students. Special adjustment counselors were employed to assist those students new to that school. Special math and reading programs were initiated to aid those who needed help with basic skills. Activities were rescheduled and special busses were made available to encourage participation in the extracurricular program.

Although difficulties in the schools were lessening, anger and frustration continued to smoulder over the closing of Carver. Following many requests to reconsider its decision, the Board of Education in a November meeting reaffirmed--but with a split vote--its previous stand that Carver would remain closed as a graded junior high school. The action triggered a series of demonstrations which included neighborhood meetings, prayer marches, picketing and sit-ins at the Education Service Center. Demonstrations ceased following expressed willingness on the part of the Board of Education to consider a plan for reopening Carver. Subsequently a plan was formulated jointly by members of the black community and school administrative staff which called for the reopening of Carver as a voluntarily integrated middle school. With this action, the black community agreed to close the Carver Freedom School and to send these pupils back to the public schools.

In February, 1972, the Board authorized the Superintendent to seek funding through Model Cities to reopen Carver. A new curriculum design featuring individualized learning on a continuous progress basis was devised for pupils in grades six through nine. The building was extensively modified for the opening of Carver Middle School in September, 1973. One of the most intensive school-community efforts in the school system's history was undertaken to recruit the 150 white and 100 black pupils who constituted the new school's first student body. Recruitment teams spoke to students in the junior high schools. Each student indicating an interest was then interviewed individually. Dedicated citizens scheduled a series of coffees in their homes and arranged meetings in churches where school officials and other parents could talk with interested students and their parents. The city's news media gave generously of their time and talent to publicize the recruitment campaign and the program to be offered at Carver.

The result of these intensive efforts was the successful opening of Carver with 250 pupils in 1973 and its expansion to 450 students, half of them black and half white, in 1974. By 1981, Carver served more than 500 students in grades six through eight, while still maintaining a 50/50 racial balance. Recruitment is still conducted, but there is no longer any concern about filling the school.

A further important step toward junior high desegregation was taken in 1980 with the closing of Roosevelt, a school which had suffered declining enrollment and a rising black percentage for a decade or more. Students were assigned to neighboring Wilson and Madison, thus bringing each of those schools very near the district average of 22% black.

Elementary Integration

As a part of his July, 1971, decision, Judge Daugherty ordered four of Tulsa's nine predominantly black elementary schools desegrated, effective in September, 1972. His ruling found these schools--Johnson, Dunbar, Woods and Bunche--to be **de jure** segregated schools, i.e., segregated as a result of the dual system found unconstitutional by the U. S. Supreme Court in 1954.

As the Board pondered the question of the four **de jure** schools, they issued an invitation to any individual or group to devise plans for desegregation and present them to the Board at designated evening meetings. Numerous plans were presented and arguments pro and con were heard. One meeting was attended by some 450 patrons, during which 26 persons spoke before the Board pleading all sides of the desegregation issue. Some decried the evils of bussing while others implored the Board to adopt a city-wide integration plan, not to impose the total burden on only a few northside schools.

Finally in October, 1971, the Board approved a plan which, it was hoped, would pave the way for final court approval of its integration efforts. This plan, which was implemented in the fall of 1972, paired Woods with Springdale and Bunche with Celia Clinton. In addition, a cluster was devised involving Dunbar, Sequoyah and Whittier. Longfellow, a small white school, was closed and its pupils assigned to predominantly black Johnson.

Meanwhile a group of concerned citizens proposed to school officials what proved to be the first successful voluntary integration effort in the Tulsa Public Schools. Encouraged by their initial efforts, these patrons met with both black and white parents at Burroughs Elementary School to discuss the project further. From these planning sessions emerged the idea for the Burroughs Little School, an open-space school with a continuous progress curriculum based upon the model which had been successfully piloted at Bunche, Columbus and Sandburg. With assurance that there would be a sufficient number of volunteer students, the school administration rushed preparations to remodel and equip prefab buildings on the Burroughs campus, to design the curriculum and to select and train teachers. The school opened in November, 1971, with 79 black and 98 white pupils. The black children came from the Burroughs area but the white pupils were transported from all sections of the school district. The Burroughs Little School with its restyled curriculum offered a smoothly operating example of how children of different races can study and live together. The success of this effort was very important in demonstrating that other schools could also be integrated voluntarily.

In November, 1971, the United States Department of Justice filed notice of appeal in the U. S. District Court against the Tulsa Board of Education. Their contention was that the five elementary schools--Burroughs, Emerson, Frost, Hawthorne and Whitman--ruled as **de facto** by Judge Daugherty in July, were actually **de jure** and must be desegregated. The Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver in May, 1972, sustained the original decision that these were **de facto** schools and no further integration action was required. Although this decision was appealed and is, in fact, still under litigation, it did enable the school system to proceed with its announced plan for integrating the

de jure elementary schools. This plan went into effect without incident in September, 1972. Although a few families moved out of the affected neighborhoods initially, the racial balances in these paired schools have held since that time, again demonstrating that integration can work.

In 1975, the court agreed to permit the construction of a new and larger Emerson, one of the five elementary schools still under litigation. The plan was to close the old Emerson and Johnson buildings, combine their student bodies, and recruit 200 white volunteers from across the city.

Like Burroughs Little School, Emerson's program was devoted to the concept of continuous progress. In addition to emphasis on basic skills, students received instruction in instrumental music beginning in the third grade and in French and Spanish beginning in the fourth grade. Emerson was an almost instant success, and continues to maintain a membership of around 700 with a 50/50 black/white ratio.

Finally, a consent order signed by Judge Daugherty on October 16, 1979, cleared the way for a plan that would desegregate the remaining four schools in question. Under the plan, Pershing Elementary School was closed and its students moved several blocks down the street to the old Roosevelt Junior High building. This move would have given the new Roosevelt Elementary School a white percentage of about 85%. To offset this imbalance, black students were recruited from Frost, Hawthorne, Whitman and Burroughs, an effort which at the same time made space available at those schools for white volunteers.

Magnet features at Roosevelt included an all-day kindergarten, a piano laboratory, career education and a leadership training program. Because of the swimming pool and other facilities, Roosevelt has one of the finest physical education programs in the district.

A program similar to the Little School was established for all students at Burroughs, and kindergarten there was expanded to a full day. The primary magnet feature at Frost is science. A program for four-year-olds and an extended-day kindergarten are operational now at Hawthorne. Also, a special program for gifted and talented students has become popular at Whitman. Grimes Elementary School, located in the heart of a well-to-do white community, has been turned into an "unofficial" magnet school to see if blacks can be attracted to a distant school with a strong academic tradition, and the effort has generated more than eighty volunteers for the 1981-82 school year. While these five schools will probably never achieve a 50/50 racial balance because of space limitations, their success speaks for the support Tulsa citizens continue to show toward our desegregation efforts.

Senior High Integration

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the whole integration process was Washington High School, the pride of the black community. This school had many outstanding graduates, numerous fine traditions and at least five recent state championships in football. To close it was unthinkable. Yet to integrate it was potentially disruptive to the entire school district.

In accordance with the integration plan approved by Judge Daugherty, the Metro Learning Center was opened at Washington in the fall of 1971. Following the school-within-a-school model, Metro offered a specially designed "living city" curriculum and an open-campus schedule. Despite concerted recruitment efforts, Metro by year end still had only 67 white and 36 black students. Additionally, there were conflicts between the Metro program which allowed students much latitude and the regular Washington program which was more structured. Thus the program was discontinued at the end of the 1971-72 school year, leaving no viable plan for the integration of Washington High School.

The Superintendent in December, 1972 announced a timetable for developing new plans for senior high school desegregation. By January the staff had developed four plans which were reviewed in detail in public meetings and were widely reported by the media. The Board sought public reaction to these plans and invited citizens to participate in formulating alternate plans. After a series of public meetings, it became evident that the community strongly favored voluntary, not forced, integration. In February, 1973 the Board directed the staff to develop a voluntary integration plan for Washington. They further specified that community agencies and patrons should be involved in formulating the plan, and that top priority of monies and staff should be given to this project. Also approved for development was a "backup" plan of compulsory student assignment to be used in the event that the voluntary plan did not produce sufficient enrollment to integrate Washington by September.

Again the community responded with offers to help devise a plan. In one evening meeting, more than 200 interested Tulsans, representing very divergent views, met to hammer out detailed suggestions for a plan. Discussions continued until late March when the Board of Education approved a plan that would open Washington on a voluntary basis with 1200 students--600 black and 600 white. Incentives to voluntary enrollment included the most extensive electives offered in any high school in the city, a top-quality volunteer faculty, and a teacher-pupil ratio of 1-17.

A concerted recruitment effort involving scores of dedicated patrons and staff members was mounted. By May 15 a sufficient number of volunteers had not yet been recruited, but because the goal now seemed within reach, the Board extended the deadline to later in the summer. The principals of Washington and Hale High Schools agreed to trade assignments to facilitate integration. Outstanding individual teachers were recruited from throughout the city. Unique courses not offered at any other high school were designed for Washington. Numerous facility improvements were made, including full air conditioning of the building.

By the fall of 1973, approximately 1,100 students, half of them white, were enrolled at Washington. The remaining black students who could not be accommodated at Washington were assigned to East Central, Edison, Hale, Mason, Memorial and Rogers, effectively integrating these schools as well. For the fall of 1974, no special recruitment was necessary to enlist the full complement of 1,100 students required to keep Washington integrated.

The resounding success of the voluntary integration programs at Carver and Washington was listed as one of the major reasons for Tulsa's selection as an

All-American City for 1973. Tulsa can well be proud of these two schools which continue even now to serve as a model of integration and community cooperation.

Adjusting to Integration

Consultative Center

Early in the integration process, the Tulsa Public Schools initiated efforts to facilitate the adjustment of all parties concerned to this new socio-educational experience. On January 25, 1967, through a grant under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Tulsa, in cooperation with the University of Oklahoma, established a Consultative Center to deal with the human relations problems incident to desegregation. This program emphasized better preparation of the school staffs, better preparation of the students sent to desegregated schools and the development of an environment of acceptance and understanding at both the sending and the receiving schools.

One of the main objectives of the Consultative Center was to prepare administrators, counselors and teachers to meet the challenges and problems of the desegregated school and to help them understand the nature and scope of the social change in which they were involved. This was accomplished by (a) conducting human relations workshops for school personnel, (b) making available the consultative services of advisory specialists who were uniquely qualified to work in integrated classrooms, and (c) giving guidance and direction to parents of pupils attending integrated schools.

In the summer of 1969, the Consultative Center operated a voluntary learning laboratory for administrators, counselors and teachers. Topics included school personnel interpersonal relationships, student interpersonal relationships, school-community relations, multi-ethnic materials, and counseling as it related to school integration.

During the 1969-1970 school year, a number of schools organized bi-racial councils that met regularly to promote communication and understanding among all persons in the school; to serve as a facility for gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information on matters of mutual concern; and to identify and assess educational needs that might be met through the classroom.

One senior high school which was experiencing student unrest was the scene for Project Listen, a two-day session in which students in groups of 10 met with an adult from the community and an adult from the Pupil Personnel and Special Education Services Division of the school system. More than 440 students participated in these discussions with the adults playing the role of listener and reporter.

Many positive steps were taken to help alleviate the situation at the school. A human relations council was formed. Two at-large posts, reserved for minority group representatives, were added to the student council and to each of the class officer groups. Two security officers, one black and one white, were assigned to the school. A communications system was approved that allowed instant communication between the principal's office and other parts of the

school. A detailed plan of procedure during periods of student unrest was established and each person in the school was made aware of the plan.

For the total school district staff, two human relations workshops, one a six-day session sponsored by the Consultative Center, were held during the 1969-70 school year as a continuation of the effort to increase community understanding. More than 400 Tulsa school personnel participated in these workshops, taking part in discussions led by a number of the nation's authorities in the area of human relations.

Human Relations Department

The Tulsa Public Schools established the Department of Human Relations to succeed the Consultative Center in August, 1970. Its objectives were the establishment of advisory services of school and community personnel, strengthening of self-concept of minority students, providing inservice workshops for school personnel involved in the desegregation process, improvement of school environment, and establishment of human relations councils and a volunteer tutorial corps.

A 24-member advisory committee comprised of school personnel, community representatives, Urban League, the Mayor's Youth Council, Community Relations Commission, University of Oklahoma Consultative Center, and Indian Affairs Commission met monthly to share ideas on the desegregation process. The Department was also instrumental in Carver Junior High School's "Project Listen" exchange of ideas and resulting faculty workshops.

Showing concern for improved relationships among all minority groups, the Department met with a faction of concerned Indians in the community. This meeting resulted in a workshop for school personnel and administrators to improve their perception of Indian students' learning needs and problems.

During its first year, the Department of Human Relations conducted workshops for 1,150 participants from twenty schools and six school-oriented organizations.

Other Efforts to Facilitate Integration

In September, 1971, "adjustment counselors" were assigned to nine newly desegregated junior high schools. Their primary responsibility was to the students who were new to the schools; however, the counselors were also available to other students who were having adjustment problems related to the desegregation process. Since the intent was to supplement the existing counseling staff, the adjustment counselors were not assigned to a regular block of students, but directed their efforts to the unique problems attendant to desegregation.

Also beginning in September, 1971, and continuing for several years, the Department of Community Affairs was on call to lend support to pupils or parents with problems incident to desegregation, such as transportation or scheduling

in the sending or receiving school. The staff members were residents of the sending community, affording better lines of communication between the homes and the schools. The Community Service Department also informed parents about school activities affecting their children and served as a "rumor central."

In addition to the programs described above, there were and are curriculum projects too numerous to describe in detail which are designed primarily for minority students at all grade levels. These deal with all areas of the curriculum, but particularly reading and mathematics.

Progress in Eliminating Racial Isolation of Black Students

As shown below, between 1968 and 1981 the number of black students attending the Tulsa Public Schools increased from 9,795 to 11,395, or a gain of 16.3%. At the same time, the number of white students dropped sharply from 70,358 to only 37,068, or a loss of 47.3% in the white enrollment. Despite this dramatic shift in the ethnic ratio, the number of black students attending racially isolated schools was reduced from 6,408 (65.4%) to 2,019 (17.7%).

During this period, the number of schools having all-white enrollments dropped from 52 out of 105, or 49.5%, to only 2 out of 94, or 2.1%. In 1968, seven schools had all-black enrollments, but by 1981, there were no longer any all-black schools.

Factor	1968	Change	1981
Total Students	80,153	- 31,690	48,463
White Students	70,358	- 33,290	37,068
Black Students	9,795	+ 1,600	11,395
Percent Black Students	12.2%	+ 11.3%	23.5%
Racially Isolated Black Students*	6,408	- 4,389	2,019
Percent of Black Students Racially Isolated*	65.4%	- 47.7%	17.7%
Total Schools	105	- 11	94
All-White Schools	52	- 50	2
Percent All-White Schools	49.5%	- 47.4%	2.1%
All-Black Schools	7	- 7	0
Percent All-Black Schools	6.7%	- 6.7%	0.0%

* A student attending a school with a black enrollment of more than 90% was defined as racially isolated.

Conclusion

Progress toward the integration of the Tulsa Public Schools has not been without some inconvenience and much patient work; but through the good faith and diligent efforts of many individuals and groups, the "impossible dream" has become a reality. Though there will certainly be new challenges in the decade ahead, we can now shift more of our energy away from computing ratios and percentages and toward insuring that minority students receive the very highest quality of education attainable.

Tulsa can indeed be proud of its successful dedication to equal opportunity for all its young citizens.